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Citation: Golding, Peter (2019) Media Studies in the UK. Publizistik, 64 (4). pp. 503-515. ISSN 1862-2569

Published by: Springer

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-019-00518-x> <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-019-00518-x>>

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Media studies in the UK

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Published online: 18 September 2019
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Abstract This article outlines the growth and character of media and communication studies in the UK. It sets out the history and development of the field, and explains its twin origins in both humanities and social sciences contexts. The article also presents some descriptive data about the scale and nature of teaching and research in the field in UK higher education, and explains the evolution of relevant subject associations. The public, political and professional reception of and response to the field are described, and the continuing debates about its value and salience examined.

1 Introduction

Media studies in the UK has a long and fractured history. Without, as in so many other European countries, a single root, in for example journalism, newspaper or press studies, the field (never a discipline) is difficult to define and impossible to identify within neat and tidy boundaries in higher education. Suffice to say that, whatever its guise, it represents what many in the more conservative and anti-intellectual quarters of British (perhaps that should be English) culture regard with huge suspicion, and not infrequent disdain. This article charts the growth and present profile of this unruly sub-set of British university life, and sets out some of the background and recent features of its contentious popularity. It does so first, by describing the origins and early growth of media and communications studies, initially and most substantially in what used to be Polytechnics, institutions translated into universities by legislation in 1992. It then describes, briefly, the emergence of subject associations for the field, and finally outlines some of the debates about its validity and value both within and outside academia.

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2 Early growth of the field¹

In the period between the two world wars the huge expansion of popular entertainment, notably the popular press and cinema, in the UK, fostered considerable debate and enquiry in UK intellectual life, and as elsewhere in Europe, and prompted an appetite for something other than the empirically, and often narrowly focused study of ‘mass communication’ as it had developed in the USA. This was patchy in the UK; the major exceptions were the studies of popular literature (Leavis 1932) and advertising (Thompson 1943) developed in the group gathered around F. R. Leavis, doyen of the Cambridge University English Faculty. Subjects allied to these concerns were little, if at all, taught in UK universities, and there was no tradition, as in the USA for example, of vocational training at university level for such occupations as journalism. The aspirational professionalization of journalism had led to some tentative attempts to create university courses. One such, developed by the Institute of Journalism towards the end of the nineteenth century with London University, included examination in literature and history, as well as the first book of Euclid, basic arithmetic, and some proficiency in Latin, French or German, alongside the more familiar skills of precis writing, shorthand, newspaper law and so on (cf. Bainbridge 1984, pp. 55–57). It came to nothing.

Concern with cinema continued after the end of the war. In 1948, the British Film Institute, which had been launched in 1933, was given particular responsibility for promoting the appreciation of film art. Its existing educational activities and outreach activities in schools expanded, (cf. Bolas 2009), and in 1957 Paddy Whannel was appointed Education Officer, later collaborating with Stuart Hall to produce the first major British critical evaluation of popular media, *The Popular Arts* (Hall and Whannel 1964). Under Whannel’s stewardship the BFI Education Department became a significant centre for the development of film studies and film theory, a movement that found an influential platform with the launch of the BFI-sponsored journal *Screen* in 1969 and the subsequent importation of new conceptual frameworks organized around semiotic and psychoanalytic categories. By the time *The Popular Arts* was published, however, the focus of public and political debate had already shifted substantially to television and its impact on social life and attitudes, particularly among children and young people.

In 1958, the German-born social psychologist Hilde Himmelweit and her collaborators at the London School of Economics published *Television and the Child* (Himmelweit et al. 1958), the first comprehensive research study conducted in Britain, funded by the Nuffield Foundation. With ‘Teddy Boys’ brawling in the streets, however, political attention was becoming increasingly preoccupied with the possible links between television and teenage delinquency. In 1961 the Home Secretary convened a conference to discuss the issue. This led to the formation of a committee to investigate further, chaired by the Vice Chancellor of Leicester University who then asked James Halloran, teaching in the University’s adult education department and

¹ This section is drawn from Murdock and Golding (2015) with permission from the editors and publisher. My thanks to them and to Graham Murdock for use of this material, which provides greater details on the intellectual and organisational growth of the field in the UK than is possible here.

having just published a critical evaluation of the media (Halloran 1963), to act as Secretary. Alongside collating existing materials, Halloran directed an original research study (Halloran et al. 1970) that opposed the simple direct ‘effects’ model and reasserted that delinquency was rooted in social conditions and inequalities. When the committee completed its work in 1966, the University established the Centre for Mass Communication Research under Halloran’s directorship, to look more generally at the organization and impact of contemporary media. The Centre’s first major study examined the production, organization and reception of news coverage of the major anti-Vietnam War demonstration in London in October 1968 (Halloran et al. 1970), presenting it as an interlocking process of textual and social construction. The analysis of newsroom routines drew on Phillip Elliott’s pioneering ethnography of the making of a television documentary series (Elliott 1972) and laid the ground for a major comparative study of news making (Golding and Elliott 1979). Work on the social and class basis of audience interpretation was followed up in studies of youth cultures (Murdock and Phelps 1973) and racism (Hartmann and Husband 1974), while analysis of media constructions of contentious events and groups was later developed in research on representations of welfare claimants (Golding and Middleton 1982) and terrorism (Schlesinger et al. 1983).

The growth of student numbers and programmes of teaching followed rather than grew from this research driven genesis. The first wave of doctoral students was attracted to the openness of the new field and its relevance to contemporary concerns (cf. Chibnall 1977; Tracey 1977; Schlesinger 1978). Together these diverse researchers established a body of work that spoke to specifically British conditions. The results began to be anthologized and codified alongside American materials (cf. Tunstall 1970a; McQuail 1972) providing resources for teaching that fed into optional modules on degrees in established disciplines and into the first dedicated undergraduate degrees in the field. The years since then have seen an accelerating process of institutionalization. Research has expanded, degrees have proliferated, dedicated journals have been launched and professional associations have been formed.

The changing relations between the media and political culture were also a major focus of the work being done in the second foundational research centre, though from a different direction. In 1958, the Granada Group, which had secured one of the first wave of franchises to operate commercial television in the north of England, funded a Television Research Fellowship at Leeds University to explore the medium’s political influence. The General Election of 1959, the first to allow television coverage of campaigning, was an obvious choice of topic and in collaboration with Denis McQuail, the inaugural Fellow, Joseph Trenaman, drew on his experience of conducting empirical research in the BBC’s Further Education department to produce the first British study of mediated politics (Trenaman and McQuail 1961). The issues raised were pursued by his successor, Jay Blumler, again in collaboration with McQuail, in a study of the next General Election, held in 1964 (Blumler and McQuail 1969). While the Leeds and Leicester centres provided institutional bases for research, interest in the organization and impact of media was also gathering momentum elsewhere in British academia, particularly within sociology. First, it was attracting scholars interested in the sociology of organizations and occupations, for

example in Jeremy Tunstall's successive investigations of advertising workers (Tunstall 1964), lobby correspondents (1970b) and specialist journalists (1974), and in Tom Burns' (1977) interview-based study of BBC culture. Second, the connections between the manufacture of news, the demonization of delinquency and the creation of 'moral panics', which Stanley Cohen had opened up in his pioneering work on the media coverage of the Mod-Rocker riots (Cohen 1972), became a central focus within the re-analysis of policing and justice being developed by the critical criminologists grouped around the National Deviancy Conference (cf. Cohen and Young 1973). Third, in 1974, the group around John Eldridge in the sociology department at Glasgow University embarked on a sustained interrogation of news as a system of misrepresentation. The first outcome, *Bad News* (Glasgow Media Group 1976), a controversial analysis of the coverage of trade unions, was followed by a succession of studies of other areas and the creation of the Glasgow Media Group as an organizational umbrella.

Alongside this mainly social science oriented approach, the other major tradition feeding into the first phase of media studies' development came from literary studies and found its main institutional base in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies which Richard Hoggart had established in 1964 within the English Department at Birmingham University. Under the intellectual leadership of Stuart Hall, who became Director on Hoggart's departure to UNESCO, much of the work of the Birmingham CCCS (which was closed in 2002) drew on theoretical and marxist writing, and produced a series of influential and seminal works (see the University of Birmingham website on the Centre which is at <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/index.aspx>). The resurgence of Marxism also coincided with the growth of critiques of popular media informed by the feminist and anti-racist movements, fuelling a renewed interest in the mediated reproduction of stereotypical conceptions of femininity and ethnic difference. Angela McRobbie's pioneering work on the culture of teenage girls' magazines at the Birmingham Centre (McRobbie 1991) and Charles Husband's work on race and media at Leicester (Husband 1975) joined a growing body of research that established work on the stereotyping and denigration of minorities as a central and continuing focus within media studies.

At the same time, a re-engagement with Marxism was shaping the emerging current of work around a critical political economy of media being developed by Graham Murdock and Peter Golding (1974) at the Leicester Centre and by Nicholas Garnham, who had moved from the BBC to head the media studies programme at the then Polytechnic of Central London, later to become the University of Westminster (cf. Garnham 1979). Critical political economy was already well established in North America, but the British variant was distinguished by its greater attention to public cultural investment as a counter to commercialization and corporate reach, a position that produced a qualified defence of public service broadcasting rooted conceptually in Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere (cf. Garnham 1986) and models of cultural citizenship (cf. Murdock 1999).

Whereas the formative phase in media studies growth as an area of research and postgraduate activity had been centred in the solid, provincial, 'red brick' universities, the major movement into undergraduate teaching occurred in the second tier

of the higher education system, the Polytechnics. Initial expansion took place under the auspices of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), established in 1965 to supervise the provision of degrees within the polytechnic sector. The traditional universities were slow to recognize either the potential or the legitimacy of emerging areas of study, a disaffection buttressed in the case of media studies by the continuing recognition that broadcasting and publishing persistently preferred Oxbridge graduates, or at least those grounded in traditional disciplines. The resulting gap in undergraduate provision offered polytechnics an opportunity to capitalize on the sheer enthusiasm for the subject matter among students.

The first undergraduate media studies degree in Britain was launched at the Polytechnic of Central London in 1975. The teaching staff drew on their diverse intellectual training to forge a distinctive 'school' of research (cf. Curran 2013) which provided the starting point for the first dedicated British journal in the field, *Media, Culture and Society*. The Westminster initiative was followed by a succession of programmes in the field approved by the CNAA, installing media studies as a distinctive feature in the higher education provided by polytechnics. One of the first textbooks for the field (Golding 1974a), was able, with some confidence rather than arrogance, to assume most relevant UK research then available was alluded to or cited in its contents.

Outside the undergraduate system, media studies has long been a popular option with students attending evening and weekend classes offered by university extra mural departments. But in 1971 the launch of the Open University (OU) opened a new national avenue for adults wishing to study at home in their spare time, taking courses that led to a degree. In 1977 the OU launched a major course in media studies, 'Mass Communication and Society' (Open University 1997). The course materials were supplemented by two major 'readers' offered on general sale, by Curran et al. (1977) and by Gurevitch et al. (1982). Both carried contributions from leading British figures in the field (including Stuart Hall and Jay Blumler) alongside chapters written by the course team. Their appearance was followed by the publication of two textbooks that codified the distinctive characteristics of the field as it was emerging in Britain. *Power Without Responsibility*, co-authored by James Curran, offered a critical account of the history of the British press and broadcasting (Curran and Seaton, 1981), and has gone on to ever increasing success and distribution, appearing in its eighth edition in 2018. *Mass Communication Theory*, authored by Denis McQuail (1983), provided a comprehensive review of research evidence and conceptual debate. McQuail's book subsequently also became an enduring and international bestseller. McQuail, who had moved to the University of Amsterdam, was also instrumental in launching the second major UK based international journal, the *European Journal of Communication*, in 1979 (see the posthumous description of McQuail's importance, and of the international impact of his textbook, in the tribute to him in that journal, December 2017).

The CNAA was abolished when the polytechnics and the universities were fused into a single sector in 1992, ceding control over the introduction of new degrees in the 'new' universities (as the polytechnics had been renamed) to individual institutions, accelerating decisions and giving an extra push to the expansion of the field. Faced with the continued vitality of the area, some of the 'old' universities, who had

initially been reluctant to add media studies to their roster of general undergraduate degrees, belatedly entered the field, a move cemented by the establishment of the programme at the London School of Economics in 2003. Resistance long remained, however, with the elite ‘Russell Group’ of universities issuing guidance in 2011 advising schools and parents not to encourage their children to take up media studies (cf. Young 2011). At the same time, belatedly recognizing the centrality of communication systems to economic, political and social life, Oxford University established major research centres in core areas of debate—the Oxford Internet Institute in 2001 and the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in 2006.²

3 Subject associations

The expansion of the field inevitably led to a growing realisation that representation of both academics and students was needed. While such associations were well established in more traditional areas, both sciences and humanities, there was no such body in media or communications. The growth having mainly been in the ‘public’ sector, that is in the colleges and other institutions that had awarded degrees under the auspices of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), not surprisingly it was initiative from within the CNAA that prompted the formation of the Standing Conference on Cultural, Communications and Media Studies in Higher Education (SCCCMSHE) in 1993. Its founding chair (the author of this article) was based at a ‘traditional’ university, but many of the early officers and members came from the Polytechnics, which became autonomous degree awarding universities after legislation in 1992. The CNAA itself ceased to exist after 1993.

The somewhat awkwardly named new association focused its attention very much on defence of the field, and on its varied negotiations and debates with funding bodies, government, research councils and the like, as well as the more normal subject association fare of subject development, academic conferences, and so on (see Bailey 1994 for an account of the second annual MeCCSA conference keynote speech by the then Chair of the main research council in social sciences in the UK). An early and continuing concern was the proper place of the more vocational and practice based areas of the field, which had their own smaller associations (the Association of Media Practice Educators—AMPE, and the Association for Journalism Education—AJE). The former eventually became part of the wider association, while the latter continues to exist separately. Cultural studies, too, had its public face in the Association for Cultural Studies, and when, after much discussion, this folded into SCCCMSHE (widely and somewhat self-deprecatingly nicknamed ‘schisms’), a new broad body was constructed in the early 1990’s—the Media, Communication, and Cultural Studies Association, or MeCCSA. This remains the major body today. The Association runs an annual conference, and has numerous subject based networks, including one for practice (see its website, <https://www.meccsa.org.uk/>). Its membership (in 2019 comprising 61 institutions, plus a further 128 individuals), includes

² A guide to studying media and communications in British universities, prepared for students, may be found on the subject association’s website at <https://www.meccsa.org.uk/resources/faqs/>.

most relevant university departments or units. Given the uncertain boundaries and multiple traditions within the UK field, not surprisingly there are also smaller associations representing ‘film and television studies’, and ‘film studies’, though many people are members of more than one, and MeCCSA is certainly the broadest and largest.

4 The situation now—a popular field for students, a butt for vilification more widely

The growth in the field is reflected in the widespread establishment and success of teaching programmes in virtually all institutions of higher education in the UK. Programmes vary enormously in their content and titles, some being very humanities oriented, others more social science in character. Equally there is wide variation in the vocational and practical elements they contain. Some are very focused on practical training in particular media, such as film, broadcasting, video gaming, or publishing, or in particular fields of practice, such as journalism or digital media. Obtaining precise figures for the population of students is more or less impossible given this hybrid, indeed wholly diverse spread of courses. This is further complicated by the categories used in bureaucratic administration of the relevant data, as the incorporation of library and information science in the research data described below illustrates.

Data on the number of academic staff now working in the field is hard to determine precisely. However, figures published after the last national Research Assessment Exercise in 2014 (then and since renamed Research Excellence Framework, or REF) showed that submissions were received from 67 institutions; the number of research active staff was 1019 (934.71 FTE). Since this panel included library and information studies in its remit the precise number in the media and communications field is impossible to establish with any certainty. Even so, compared to the 2373 staff submitted in biological sciences and the 3320 submitted for business and management, media studies remains a small component of the university system. Salutory also is data about research funding in the field. Unlike some other countries, little funding for media research within UK academia is provided by the industries, leaving researchers heavily dependent on public money from the research councils and, (for the moment!), the EU, and funding from charities. Again precise figures are hard to obtain but the same REF data for the last year looked at, 2013/14, showed that the field assessed (including both library and information studies as well as communication, cultural and media studies) attracted a total of £ 13 million that year, as against £ 15.7 million in English, £ 63 million in business and management studies, or £ 159 million in computer science. The spend on academic research in cultural and media studies in this period was however dwarfed by the amounts spent outside the universities, with the main regulator Ofcom, alone spending £ 5.04 million on audience research in 2017/8, while turnover in the market research industry in 2016 was at least £ 4 billion.

Higher education in the UK expanded rapidly in the late twentieth and into the twenty first century, as entry to university changed from being a rare experience

enjoyed by a small elite minority to one in which the numbers of full-time students reached around 2,300,000 (over a third of the age group), by 2017/18. Funding per student dropped significantly, however, and after 1989 the levels of maintenance grants, which since 1985 had been means tested, were frozen. The number of students in the field of media studies also grew rapidly, though, as noted above, figures are difficult to determine precisely due to the categories used. The biggest increases in recent years have actually been in veterinary science, biological sciences, and mathematics. In ‘mass communication and documentation’ there was an increase of 5%, from 48,000 to just over 50,000 between 2007/8 and 2017/18, though even that higher figure represents just 2.2% of the total university student population (cf. Universities UK 2018, p. 19). Unpicking the available data a little we find that, in addition, in 2017/18 about 32,000 students were enrolled on media studies programmes, and about 11,500 on journalism programmes (cf. Higher Education Statistics Agency 2019). While much larger numbers of students are categorised as in ‘creative arts and design’ degree programmes, (176,000 in 2016/17), this would include many courses rather at or beyond the margins of any recognisable area of activity for people in media, communications, or cultural studies.

These figures point to a relatively modest institutional base within the academy, but this has not silenced long-standing political attacks on media studies, amplified by popular media commentary, that dismiss media studies as an area that has no legitimate place in a university. The obloquy that the field has recurrently endured has been a distinctive feature of its growth in UK academia. Such critical commentary has often come both from within and without. Traditional universities were originally quite sceptical of the upstart field they regarded as an affront to the more rigorous and respectable fields of scholarship they housed, in the humanities especially. Only when economic uncertainty was confronted by the palpable enthusiasm of fee-paying students, not least from overseas, for media studies in its various forms, did such universities embrace, and indeed invest in, the area.

That the field in the UK was different from that in the USA was one root of its vulnerability to criticism. While in the USA the field had emerged with strong traditions in vocational training, especially for journalism, and with very applied and administrative strengths in audience research in topics such as sex, violence, health and even marketing, in the UK the strong legacy of the radical investigation of popular culture arising from humanities departments (and morphing into ‘cultural studies’), and of social science concerns with the political economy of the media, the implications of ‘mass communication’ for politics or social inequality, and the representation of class, age, gender and ethnic differentiation, all fostered characteristics that were readily derided and dismissed.

This position has often been expressed with particular force by politicians. In 1993 the then Minister for Education, John Patten, announced that he had “ordered an enquiry within the Department of Education to try and find out why some young people are turned off by the laboratory, yet flock to the seminar room for a fix of one of those contemporary pseudo-religions like media studies ... For the weaker minded, going into a cultural Disneyland has an obvious appeal” (Patten 1993, p. 14). More than a decade later, Michael Gove, then Secretary of State for Education (and a former *Times* journalist), restated this position, arguing that: The current problem

with subjects like media studies relates to the way ... They encourage schools to push a subject which, currently, actually limits opportunities ... some schools still steer students towards subjects such as media studies because they know it is easier to secure a pass (cf. Gove 2010). This followed a report commissioned into the supposed dumbing down of education generally, in which putatively ‘soft’ subjects like media studies were compared very unfavourably with ‘proper’ subjects like maths and physics. The result, as the *Indy* newspaper summarised it in a headline, was the forecast that ‘Tories to Tackle the Media Studies Menace’ (16, August 2009). It was this line of thought that led to similar attacks on the teaching of the subject in schools. The numbers of school students examined in media studies fell markedly between 2008 and 2014, even though in that latter year media studies remained the tenth most popular subject among school-leaver candidates. Indeed, the supposed ‘push’ towards media studies has not, in any case, produced large numbers of entrants for school examinations. In 2017, of 259,000 students who sat the GCSE A level examinations for those who stay on after the compulsory leaving age, just 6.7% sat media, film or TV studies, and 2.3% film studies (cf. Gill 2018). The debate about the proper status and content of relevant courses in schools, and indeed their very survival, continues.

The sneering attack has also been sustained from within the media themselves, particularly from senior journalists affronted by the notion that their own status might be achievable from scholarship rather than ‘learning on the job’. Sir Michael Parkinson, who left school at 16, told the *Daily Mail* in 2016, that media studies degrees “attract fame-hungry youngsters wanting a short-cut into reality television”. These ‘Mickey Mouse degrees’ (the term has become recurrent since its use by a former education Minister, Margaret Hodge), have been a constant butt of media critics. John Humphrys, the presenter of BBC radio’s flagship current affairs programme, argues that “the idea of three years at university doing journalism is barmy”. The *Sunday Times* suggested that a degree in media studies was “little more than a state funded, three year equivalent of pub chat” (12 December, 1998). The *Independent*, in an issue lamenting the growth of the field, and with a column on the subject headed ‘the trendy travesty’, offered an editorial suggesting “Media studies is a trivial, minor field of research, spuriously created for jargon-spinners and academic make-weights. Students learn nothing of value because the subject doesn’t know its own purpose, is unimportant, and because most people teaching it don’t know what they are talking about” (31, October, 1996). Journalist Janet-Street Porter bemoaned the fact that young people leave school “with qualifications that are pretty light-weight, often in subjects that are a joke, such as media studies” (*Daily Mail*, 17 August, 2009). Another uninhibited commentator, Richard Littlejohn, in the same newspaper, pointed to the costly consequences: “It is hard-working taxpayers who must foot the bill for students to spend four years on meaningless media studies courses before segueing into feather-bedded, meaningless employment in the public sector” (*Daily Mail*, 12 November 2010).

Such criticisms from within the media have been sustained and frequently contested from the academy. Indeed their recurrence has been the subject of careful analysis, in a content analysis study commissioned by the national subject association (Bennett and Kidd 2017). In this study, looking at media coverage in 2010–2015,

the authors concluded that, despite contrary evidence, media studies was routinely portrayed in the press as an employment cul-de-sac, and of little if any value. The critique along these lines has thus rested on two large presumptions, that media studies lacks academic rigour and serious content, and that it leads nowhere in terms of employment. The first of these seems little related to the actual content of media studies courses, while the latter is unlikely in the face of the rapid growth and diversification of the ‘cultural industries’, among the rare points of light in the gloomy landscape of UK economic prospects. Together with posts in the wider ‘creative industries’ the creative economy has been expanding faster than any other sector of the economy, probably providing well over 3 million jobs by 2017.

In fact, the complaint about the employment prospects of media studies graduates sits at odds with the evidence, which over the years has seen such students benefit from their broad range of skills in obtaining very diverse jobs, though not only within ‘the industry’. In this they have frequently fared better than their colleagues from more traditional programmes. In an analysis of the graduate labour market in 2018 it was found that while 72.9 per cent of media studies graduates were in employment six months after graduation, the figure for all graduates was 67.1 per cent, though fewer than in other fields went on to further study. The employment figure for maths graduates was 55.8 per cent, English 54.4 per cent, History, 51.5 per cent, biology 46.9 per cent, chemistry 51.1 per cent, and so on (cf. AGCAS 2018). Much could be unpacked from these figures but they certainly do not reflect the invective commonly directed at the field, even if one wished to share the dubious logic and philosophy that measures the value of a university education by its labour market value.

Riposte to the endless stream of diatribes about the field has been energetic from within the academy, and the subject association (MeCCSA) has played a particularly active role in this. At its 2013 annual conference the distinguished media scholar James Curran provided an astute analysis of such criticism, and a clarion call for Mickey Mouse to ‘squeak back’ (Curran 2013). Others have related the criticisms to the wider attempts to foster a utilitarian focus for British universities, and thus the fundamental questions raised about the very purpose of university education (see, for example, Berger and McDougall 2012). For many years UK higher education has been the subject of regular government enquiries which have sought to relate the cost of education, whether to the individual student or to the public purse, to a direct indication of its value to the individual (as customer rather than student) in the labour market (see Golding 2016). The most recent manifestation of this, a report on the funding of post-18 education funding, chaired by Philip Augar, made much of what it describes as “bearing down on low-value HE”, and while for once not name-checking media studies, many in the field, and indeed across the humanities and social sciences, heard alarm-bells ringing (Augar 2019).

5 Conclusion

Media studies in the UK, notably in university research and teaching, has a long history, and has enduring attractiveness to students. Its expansion in the last thirty

or so years has found it firmly established, in a variety of formulations, as a key component of what universities provide, both to their students and more widely. At the same time, the international influence and importance of UK scholarship, whether as cultural studies or as media research, has probably far outweighed its scale, only partly explained by the inevitable advantage that working in the English language delivers. Its students are extremely employable, and its research is at the heart of public debate as well as in the academy. Despite this growth the field remains a contentious target for much derision from both media commentators and politicians. Its continued growth and efficacy are far from inevitable, and like much else in UK academe, require constant vigilance and lobbying.

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